



PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, March 19th, 2024 6pm

Conference Room – Main Floor Admin Building
130 Jacob's Way, Clarkesville GA, 30523

Roll Call

- ✓ Joe Elam
- ✓ Peggy Fortson
- ✓ Cassie Head
- ✓ Angela Haughton
- ✓ Keith Deyton

Malik Watkins – UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government
Commissioner Bruce Palmer
Brooke Whitmire – Director, HCRD

Old Business/Minutes

1. Old Business
 - a. Brooke is working on a “virtual business card” to be used for social media posts
 - b. Submitted ticket to IT to check on Rec Board inbox for suggestions, etc. as well as a “contact us” section on county website

Commissioner Palmer mentioned the need for the board to elect officers – at least Chairperson & Vice Chairperson. Discussion around need for other positions.

2. Approval of February 2024 Minutes

Motion to approve – Joe Elam, Second – Angela Haughton, Approved 5-0

New Business/Current Events

1. Written Report – Director, Brooke Whitmire
 - a. **Parks and Recreation Department Budget Hearing: Thursday, March 28th @ 9:45am – Admin Building**

A question was raised and discussed around how the department chooses to keep athletics in house or play other agencies. Director Whitmire explained that HCPR tries to schedule age groups in house if possible. Most families would rather games be in Habersham County because it makes it easier for their families. However, to play in house an age group would need at least 3-4 teams in that age group. If there are 3 or less teams, HCPR does look to schedule with other agencies to fill out a season schedule.

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Some discussion around the success of the fitness center. HCPR has surpassed the original number of members which was reported prior to HCPR taking over. Check-in's to the fitness center during the month of February were higher than any month recorded in 2023!

2. Carl Vinson Study Input

Dr Watkins introduced himself & his background. Explained that he'd spent the past few months coming up to visit and learn more about our community. He also explained what we are looking to do with the study we're conducting.

a. How are things going now?

Mentioned how the Advisory Board is "fresh" most members of the board are new (within 3 months) discussion around lack of experience to say that there is a good finger on the pulse just yet. However, there was also discussion of how our "fresh" eyes and ideas are also a huge benefit to bringing new perspectives and energy to the table.

Community wants to do great and wants kids to succeed, but as a community we are not "putting our money where our mouth is" – discussion around the need to put financial resources and otherwise to the parks and recreation department. We want to know that our facilities are maintained the way they need to be, and we can provide for the future.

All agreed that one of the best things about our community is the potential we have. However, we're handicapped with resources available to us. Discussion around how many surrounding counties can do a lot with SPLOST dollars that are not available to us here in Habersham County. There was also discussion about how the county pays the benefits of school resources officers, which creates an additional burden on the county.

Commissioner Palmer discussed his vision for the Advisory Board and that it will become a great advocate of the Parks and Recreation Department and its participants and departmental needs.

Director Whitmire mentioned how happy and proud she already is of this group of people and how well they have already supported each other and herself in just a few weeks/months. The group discussed taking a position from the medical world and possibly using it for the Parks and Recreation Department in implementing a patron advocate program.

b. What are the current needs?

Deferred maintenance and needed facility upgrades. Discussion over the state of the pool deck. Cassie mentioned being in the pool area helping coach with the youth team & she said the coating is coming up so badly that she must clean her feet off after walking around

in the area. The group discussed what a danger that can pose to patrons as well. Sometimes the pieces breaking off can be sharp, hard pieces of paint.

Talked about how the board can work to help educate people about the Parks and Recreation Department, it's needs, what they offer, how they can help. All agreed that the more we can teach people about what we do, how things work, and why we need the things we are asking for, the better off we'll be. Discussed how we try to put information on the receipts people get when they register with us & utilizing that to help get information out.

Discussed the need to update the county website. Director Whitmire walked the board through what the Parks and Recreation Department's new site will be like once the build out is completed with RecDesk. However, many people still go directly to the county's website for information and not having one that's up to date is a challenge.

It was brought up that we need to do our best to gain as much public input as possible. Director Whitmire brought up the plan to implement end of season surveys beginning this season as soon as Spring Sports come to an end. Cassie mentioned "promoter scores" they use in her job & all discussed how something like that could be implemented with the Parks and Recreation Department. There was also discussion over the implementation of the department's new feedback inbox and the plan to put information out around all facilities to hopefully gain frequent input from users.

Discussed the need for training for volunteer coaches. There was discussion around the possibility of working with the school's coaches to come out and help, or potentially utilized the National Alliance for Youth Sports. However, some challenges can be time and money. It's a challenge to get coaches many times & there is a fear that asking them to do extra training would make things even more difficult. Director Whitmire discussed how she feels, like having some of the schools' coaches come out and help work extremely well. It helps build community and gives those coaches a chance to meet up and coming athletes. Discussed potentially making a place on the new website for coaches where they can find out fundamental information about each sport.

A question was posed about barriers to participation in Parks and Recreation Department sports and events. For several, location was a focus and there was discussion around the need for facilities on the South end of the county. We also discussed if registration costs were a large barrier or not and how we could find out?

It was also brought up that PARKS is part of our department name and how we have such wonderful natural resources here in the county for us to not offer any passive use park space, which could be done through the department. We have a diverse population here where many of our folks are in the 50 Forward age range & many of those people are looking for other types of recreation than just youth sports. Many folks simply want a safe space to go walk and enjoy nature. There was discussion over different walking trail programs and plans to implement a greenway or joining trail system of some sort. Many of the areas needed to create a system of that sort pass through private properties and residential areas and there is a lot of reservation about how well it would go over with property owners.

Another idea was brought up that we focus on connecting our existing park spaces with trails. Right now, people utilize the Aquatic Center Complex and parking lot space for walking. If we had a dedicated trail around the ball fields and other facilities, they would be well used. The county also has many properties that could be developed. We just need a plan on how we are going to get to that in the future. There was also discussion around how nice it would be to possibly connect the Aquatic Center Complex property to the Fairgrounds & Diamond Memorial property across Toccoa Hwy. Many events require that people park at the Aquatic Center and walk across the road to attend an event or ballgames sometimes. Same thing goes for large events at the Aquatic Center.

Director Whitmire asked "How important are community wide events?" – all agreed they are very important, that's something that's missing from what we currently offer. There was also discussion around how these things would be little to no cost because it's about creating community and giving our community members a safe, fun space to bring their families for fun.

While discussing facilities at HCPR, it was brought up that we've rented a building for our Gymnastics program since 2012. There was discussion about how we may have been able to build a building for what we've paid in rent over the last decade. Gymnastics is also an ever evolving and growing program who desperately needs a larger, better space to conduct business. The building we rent for the program is in the Habersham Mills facility which is extremely old. One of the biggest challenges we have there is that the roof leaks and the tar used to fix the roof drips onto our gymnastics floors each summer. A new facility with dedicated parking and space would also help create a revenue opportunity because we'd be able to host meets throughout the year. Something we cannot do where we are currently.

3. Suggestion on accessible playground brought to Director, Brooke Whitmire

A parent emailed with a request that we consider building an accessible playground for all abilities. There's only one playground currently at our facilities which needs to be replaced, but we'd already been discussing adding a playground at the Aquatic Center Complex. If we could build one that would give people of all abilities the opportunity to play, it would be great.

4. 2024 Remaining Meeting Dates – all held at Habersham County Administrative building beginning at 6:00p

- a. ~~February 20th~~
- b. ~~March 19th~~
- c. April 16th
- d. May 21st
- e. June 18th
- f. July 16th

- g. August 20th
- h. September 17th
- i. October 15th
- j. November 19th
- k. December 17th

The question was posed "What are your priorities in the upcoming budget?" (to Director Whitmire) Response: staffing is number 1, we've requested 1 full-time coordinator position that would help in athletics needs. Another full-time coordinator would also open up the possibility for us to grow in adult programming as well. We've also requested 3 part-time, as needed, Instructor positions. The reason for this is that we want to provide more for our patrons that would be included in their membership price. Second would be CIP requests for our department. CIP requests cover much of the deferred maintenance needs for the department like resurfacing the pool deck, replacing the doors on the pool deck with composite, re-modeling outdoor restrooms, replacing scoreboards and lighting on the ballfields, etc.

Officials were elected. Commissioner Palmer helped lead the selection of Chairman.
Nominated: Angela Haughton – Commissioner Palmer called vote – Carried 5-0.

Chairman Haughton called for nominations for Vice Chairman. Nominated: Peggy Fortson, Cassie Head. Peggy removed her nomination. Chairman Haughton called a vote – Carried 5-0.

Chairman – Angela Haughton
Vice Chairman – Cassie Head

Upcoming Events

1. March Member Initiative – "Run/Walk a Marathon" in March! Fitness membership members track milage through the Month of March to complete a marathon. Finishers will receive a prize & shoutout on Facebook
2. March 23rd - Mountain Top Jeep Invasion
3. March 25th - Spring Volleyball, Tball, Coach Pitch, Baseball, Softball Games Start
4. April 1st & 2nd - Dusty's All Star Circus
5. April 6th - NE GA Car Swap
6. April 13th - USFA Softball Tournament
7. April 20th – USFA Softball Tournament & Swim Safely Day!
8. April 26th – 27th – Arts and Crafts Show

Adjourn

Motion by Joe Elam

Seconded by Cassie Head

Time: 8:01